

CLAIMS

1. A method of operating a magnetic resonance apparatus in which magnetic gradient coils are used to generate one
5 or more magnetic field gradients in a working volume so as to define regions from which magnetic resonance signals are obtained in use from a target material; characterised in that,

a set of at least two magnetic gradient coils are
10 provided for producing the magnetic field gradient in a particular direction, and in that, for each of the defined regions, the one or more magnetic field gradients are controlled in accordance with the position of the said region with respect to the gradient coils by
15 controlling the ampere-turns values within the at least two coils of the set independently, so as to apply one or more magnetic field gradients of predetermined uniformity within the region.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the defined
20 regions are arranged as a series of regions, such the combined volume of the regions substantially intersects a target volume of the target material, the target volume being a volume of the target material from which it is desired to obtain the magnetic resonance signals.

25 3. A method according to claim 2, wherein the one or more magnetic field gradients applied to a particular region are dissimilar to those applied to an adjacent region.

4. A method according to claim 2 or claim 3, wherein
30 the magnetic field gradient uniformity within regions at the periphery of the working volume is thereby increased so as to allow improved magnetic resonance signals to be obtained from such regions.

5. A method according to any of the preceding claims,
35 wherein the working volume is arranged to one side of the coils comprising the magnetic resonance apparatus, and wherein the regions are arranged in the working volume.

6. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein each region comprises a substantially planar slice.

7. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the method further comprises, within a particular region, controlling the one or more magnetic field gradients in accordance with the location of the target material of interest within that region.

8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the regions are arranged along a Z axis defining the magnetic field direction of the magnetic resonance apparatus, and wherein, within a particular region, the magnetic field gradients are controlled along an X axis and/or a Y axis, the X and Y axes being substantially orthogonal to the Z axis.

9. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein when the region is situated at $z=z'$ then the desired gradient G_z is determined in accordance with the conditions:-

$B_z(z') = G_z \cdot z'$ so as to position the slice correctly;

$B_z(z) \neq G_z \cdot z'$ for $z \neq z'$ over the working volume so as to avoid aliasing; and

$\frac{\partial B_z}{\partial z} \Big|_{z=z'} \approx G_z$ to achieve the correct slice thickness;

wherein $B_z(z')$ is the B field in the z direction at the position $z=z'$ and wherein the B_0 field is in the z direction.

10. A method according to claim 9 wherein the gradient is determined in accordance with the condition $\frac{\partial^2 B_z}{\partial x^2} = 0$ so as to eliminate curvature of the region.

11. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein when the region is situated at $x=x'$ then the desired gradient G_x is determined in accordance with the conditions:-

$B_x(x') = G_x \cdot x'$ so as to position the slice correctly;

$B_z(x) \neq G_x \cdot x'$ for $x \neq x'$ over the working volume so as to avoid aliasing; and

$\frac{\partial B_z}{\partial x} \Big|_{x=x'} \approx G_x$ to achieve the correct slice thickness;

wherein $B_z(x')$ is the B field in the z direction at the position $x=x'$ and wherein the B_0 field is in the z direction.

12. A method according to claim 12 wherein the gradient is determined in accordance with the condition $\frac{\partial^2 B_z}{\partial z^2} = 0$ so as to eliminate curvature of the region.

10 13. A magnetic resonance apparatus comprising:-

a magnet system for generating a magnetic field in a working volume;

magnetic gradient coils for generating one or more magnetic field gradients in the working volume so as to define regions from which magnetic resonance signals are obtained from a target material; and

a controller for operating the magnetic gradient coils in use so as to apply one or more magnetic field gradients within each region, characterised in that

20 the magnetic gradient coils comprise a set of at least two magnetic gradient coils for producing the magnetic field gradient in a first direction, and in that,

for each of the defined regions, the controller is further adapted in use to control the one or more magnetic field gradients in accordance with the position of the said region with respect to the magnetic gradient coils by controlling the ampere-turns values within the at least two magnetic gradient coils of the set independently, such that the one or more magnetic field gradients have a predetermined uniformity within the region.

14. Apparatus according to claim 13, wherein a set of at least two magnetic gradient coils are provided for producing the magnetic field gradient in each of, a second direction, or a second and third direction

- respectively, wherein for each set the ampere-turns values of at least two of the said coils are independently controllable using the controller.
- 5 15. Apparatus according to any of claims 13. to 15, wherein the working volume is arranged to one side of the coils comprising the magnetic resonance apparatus, and wherein the regions are arranged in the working volume.
- 10 16. Apparatus according to claim 15, wherein the axes for the gradient coils are each arranged along a common direction.
17. Apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the gradient coils within one set are arranged coaxially.
- 15 18. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the set comprises at least 3 independently controllable Z gradient coils.
19. Apparatus according to any of claims 14 to 18, further comprising a controllable current supply for providing current independently to the at least two magnetic gradient coils within each coil set.